



NEWS RELEASE

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AG CENSUS RESPONSE RATE LAGS, FARMERS URGED--MAKE AGRICULTURE COUNT!

WASHINGTON, Feb. 26, 2003 --2002 Census of Agriculture response rates are lagging behind previous censuses, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. NASS wants farmers and ranchers to know that their voice still counts.

"We urge everyone who hasn't yet completed and returned their 2002 Census of Agriculture report forms to do so today," said NASS Administrator Ron Bosecker. "Every response counts to produce quality data."

"We are now starting to intensify our data collection efforts, which require more expensive methods such as telephone calls and personal visits. Producers can help keep down the cost of the census by returning their forms by mail," said Bosecker.

NASS wants farmers, ranchers and agriculturalists from every sector of the industry to know how crucial it is that they complete and return their census forms. Not only do data gathered from the census provide information for local and state agricultural investment decisions, they help local, state and national representatives and agencies make informed agricultural policy decisions and help the U.S. compete for its share of the global agriculture market. Information gathered also ensures quick access to vital local statistics in the event of a natural disaster or possible homeland security threat.

The census of agriculture is the sole source of comprehensive, detailed agricultural facts for every county in the United States, and is only conducted every five years. For more information, or for assistance in completing your census form, visit our Web site at www.nass.usda.gov/census/ or call 1-888-4AG STAT.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For background information and sample 2002 Census report forms, and for data from the last Census, visit www.nass.usda.gov/census/. Public service announcements, news releases, editorials and similar materials may be found by clicking on "Help Us Promote the 2002 Census" or by calling 1-800-727-9540 or by contacting your local State Statistical Office at www.usda.gov/nass/ under "State Information."